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ABSTRACT

Without formal funding, parents and teachers developed a week's activities for grades K-6 at a Montgomery County (Maryland) elementary school. The week involved explorations of women's history, changing roles for women and men and boys and girls, and occupational alternatives for both sexes. The report includes a guide for others who may want to duplicate this activity in their elementary schools. Some of the activities/ideas that were most successful are also included. (Author/DS)

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DEVELOPMENT OF AN ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM FOR A "WOMEN"S WEEK": "WOMEN YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW"

Without formal funding, parents and teachers developed a week's activities for grades K-6 at a Montgomery County Elementary School. The week involved explorations of Women's History, changing roles for women and men and boys and girls, and occupational alternatives for both sexes. The week was so well received that this report includes a guide for others who may want to duplicate this activity in their elementary schools. Some of the activities/ideas that were most successful are also included.

Jan Dynda Sinnott, Ph.D.

In Cooperation with the
MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

How it began

The idea for a "Women's Week" at the elementary level was suggested by parents in the community who were aware of the lack of materials on women's history in the schools. Some parents were also concerned that their children might not be getting a realistic picture of the opportunities open to them in adulthood due to the sex role stereotypes in older educational materials. Working through the Title IX liaison, the idea of a Women's Week---analogous to Black History Week---was explored with the Human Relations Office of Montgomery County Schools. The Title IX Office and the area office were also consulted. When it became clear that such a week was not already planned by the County Schools, the parents decided to create a model curriculum prototype which would be tested at the local elementary school (Cresthaven, in Silver Spring, MD). If the model proved successful, it might be used in other schools in the County or elsewhere. The principal, the staff, and the PTSA of Cresthaven were responsive to the idea of developing such a curriculum.

Implementation

The Title IX liaison from Cresthaven (Sinnott) took on the role of coordinator. The first step was to locate curriculum materials appropriate for the elementary grades. Contacts were made with the Commission for Women, the National Organization for Women, the National Education Assoc., and other individuals who had developed lessons in this area. The materials belonging to the Human Relations/Title IX Office of the County Schools were also surveyed. The Public Library System was contacted, as was the library at Cresthaven.

It quickly became apparent that materials were lacking in two areas. First, very few elementary-level books with strong female characters, historical women as characters, or working women as main characters existed. Second, although recommendations for types of lessons appropriate for a Women's Week were plentiful, lessons themselves were not. No coordinated activities reaching the whole elementary population (K-6) in a school were found. In contrast to the healthy supply of materials showing Blacks in positive roles, Black History, etc,. found in the Human Relations Department Curriculum Library, there were almost no materials and lessons available to counteract the negative stereotype (or invisibility) of women in standard materials. (The Department did express an interest in obtaining some materials and is beginning to do so.)

Whatever materials were available, (including adult level books and materials) were taken to Cresthaven to serve as resources for teachers who wanted to develop lessons or bulletin boards. The volunteer Faculty Coordinator (Ruth Haynes) and the Coordinator (Jan Sinnott) decided on three areas of emphasis for the week, then discussed them with the Faculty.

The three areas of emphasis were: 1) women's history; 2) changing roles of boys and girls, men and women; and 3) widening occupational choice. A handout summary about the week was given to the teachers (see Appendix). The teachers had a wealth of ideas about activities that might be done at all levels. Ms. Guido, the principal, was courageously accepting of the inevitable disruptions visitors would cause during that week. Faculty enthusiasm was apparent.

A committee of parents was gathered together to contact women (and men) in nontraditional occupations and set up times for them to visit Cresthaven during that week. The committee also provided assistance to teachers who needed certain materials or bulletin board items, or other types of help. Members made certain that refreshments were on hand for visitors, and for the faculty who were working hard enough to need an extra "lift".

HOW TO DO IT YOURSELF

Our experience at Cresthaven in creating a Women's Week was meant to be shared, so that other schools might use the idea and enrich the curriculum in this area. We hope that every county will find time for a Women's Week, as they do for a Black History Week. It takes a little extra push to make up for curricular deficits in these areas.

What you need: No grants, a coordinator, a few helpers, and the enthusiasm of your school staff.

A Timetable of Tasks

More Than 2 months before:

- Obtain the cooperation of your principal, the school system, and your PTSA.
- Decide what the goals of your Week are (generally, a greater knowledge of "her story", changing roles, changing jobs for women).
- Visit with the faculty and find a willing liaison; pick a date.

Two months before:

- Contact local women's organizations for support, interesting speakers, and materials for the classroom.
- Obtain the support of volunteer assistants who will help coordinate speakers, make bulletin boards, make materials, provide refreshments for visitors, etc. You can do it all yourself, but it's hard.

One month before:

- Notify parents of the coming week by flyers and articles in the local newsletters, etc. Enlist their support and ideas, and see when they can volunteer to talk to the children about their jobs.
- Note the speakers who have volunteered, and see if they represent the range of jobs you'd like the children to know that BOTH sexes can do.
- If not, start locating those missing persons yourself.
- Call the utilities and the TV stations and tell your story to their public relations person.

Three Weeks Before:

- Find out if assistant coordinators need help with their tasks. See if teachers need help with materials or displays. Schedule speakers to visit rooms at coordinated, reasonable times.

Two Weeks Before:

- Contact local papers and the newsletter of the School System to let them know that something interesting is happening at your school. Try to let them know a few times and days of key activities, in case they want to observe.

Movies such as "Hey, What About Me," "Do Your Own Thing", "He and She", followed by discussion.

Discussions with/after the volunteer's visits; the talk centered on how they combine home and job, the satisfactions of their jobs, the training it takes.

Creation of classroom bulletin boards showing women in varied jobs and careers.

Collection of pictures and news stories with women as central characters.

Three magazine ad collages: women; men; both women and men. Discussion focused on...what media tell us we are like vs. reality of wide range of characteristics.

Research projects and reports (written and verbal) on the life and accomplishments of famous women.

Reports by students on careers. Compilation of career notebooks.

Pre/post Test: children draw men and women before and after the week. Some portraits less stereotyped after the week. This provoked discussion. (Ruth Haynes)

Class debate on the Equal Rights Amendment; viewed by other classes.

Bulletin Boards

In addition to the classroom activities thought-provoking bulletin boards were developed. For example, one board in the entrance hall matched descriptions with names and pictures of famous women. One class made a hall decoration with clippings from magazines. The clippings showed the media's narrow image of what men or women should be. The displays led to lively discussion on real-life roles of men and women, in all their diversity

Book Talks

The Children's Librarian from White Oak Branch of the county Library gave Book Talks to children in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. The books were selected on the basis of having strong and interesting women/girl main characters, portraying women in history, or raising issues related to changing sex roles. The librarians also set up special book displays which would appeal to younger children who would not have attended the talks.

ACTIVITIES DURING WOMEN'S WEEK

Visitors

In the course of the week of March 13th through 17th, 1978, twenty-three parents or volunteers, mainly women, who worked at both professional and non-professional occupations visited Cresthaven. These visitors talked with either classes or assemblies of children at every-level in the school. They did demonstrations, discussed what their jobs entailed, how one could become a member of that occupation, what was interesting about the job, etc. In this way, non-stereotyped role models were provided for all the children, many of whom were not aware that women could (or would) be lawyers, or firepeople, or that men might be tailors. The occupations represented included demographer, Naval officer, police, fireperson, engineer, lighting designer, executive, tailor, nurse, installer, steamfitter, biologist, occupational therapist, physician, health planner, lawyer, psychologist, Board of Education member, artist, and veterinarian.

In addition to visits from working women, a woman from the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) conducted a discussion of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, and issues that it entailed.

The visitors served two purposes in the curriculum. First, they stimulated discussion and ideas among the children. Children were encouraged to think of themselves in various roles, and to explore issues at their level of understanding. The overriding effect, though, was the positive one of seeing active, dynamic women who were possible role models, and of openly discussing the unrealistic sex-role stereotypes in today's world. The women who visited Cresthaven were, for the most part, the mothers of children at the school. They successfully combined career and family, and were known to some of the children, real people. The overall effect seemed to be to enlarge children's perceptions about what they could do and be, and to assist their understanding of current social changes and issues.

The most effective way of presenting these visitors to the children was found to be "class-by-class". Assemblies were attempted, but these did not allow for as much give-and-take among students and the visitors. Younger children toward the back of the group were likely to lose interest sooner in a large group. Demonstrations were also very effective; the best approach, to no one's surprise, was to allow for the most class involvement possible in the presentation.

Teachers' Individual Lessons

Before the Week began, teachers were all given copies of a form on which they could keep a record of classroom lessons related to the Week. Evaluation of these lessons were also to be made on the form (see Appendix). Below are listed a sampling of the activities done as classroom lessons by the teachers:

- Give schedule of speakers and activities to teachers so that they can sign up for visits by the volunteer visitors.

- Give a schedule to the office so that office staff will know what's happening, and will be able to make any suggestions.

One week before:

- Verify times and days of visits with volunteer speakers.

- Make arrangements with speakers to go to some central location to receive directions to the rooms they will visit.

- Give the final schedule to the office and the teachers, and post one in the hall for unscheduled visitors who might want to observe.

The week:

Enjoy the activities !

Afterward:

- Summarize and evaluate the activities that took place in your school so others may learn from your experience.

- What worked best?

- Thank the volunteers and the speakers and the staff.

- Spread the word about your week.

- Return materials, and relax until next year.

<u>Things We Would Do Differently Next Time</u>:

- Get materials to teachers even earlier.

- Spread visiting discussants out over a longer period of time. Some teachers wanted to have visits from more, but thought more visitors would be overwhelming.

- Have parents prepared to lead the class in certain consciousness raising activities, such as analyzing textbooks for male/female characters, if teachers did not feel comfortable with the activity.

- Do pre and post tests on <u>all</u> the classes.

- Include a young father and/or a househusband.

- Limit activities to groups numbering less than 40 (about two classes.)

Appendix

CRESTHAVEN PRESENTS

DOUBLE THE FUN FAIR

DATE: SATURDAY, MARCH 11

TIME: 10 A.M. - 3 P.M.

PLACE: CRESTHAVEN SCHOOL

Grab bags, Bake Sale, Auction, Games, White Elephant Sale, Zoo

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WOMEN'S HISTORY

During the week of March 13, Cresthaven will enjoy some presentations and activities designed to educate students in Women's History and the wide variety of jobs that will be open to them when they become adults. Also, students will have an opportunity to discuss changing expectations for males and females.

Activities planned include discussions, book talks, and other classroom activities. A new supply of books will be available from the county. Parents with a variety of jobs have been invited to come to school and talk about or demonstrate what they do everyday.

If you would like to help by talking about your job, or by making bulletin boards, etc. call Cresthaven or Jan Sinnott, 434-1570 home, or drop a note to the school or 1109 Devere Drive, Jan's home.

HOST FAMILIES

Maryland families are needed to host English speaking European teachers as guests in their homes for a 7 - 10 day period this summer. For information call Gwen McCallum, 588-1675 or Dagne Evans, 774-4645.

PTA MEETING APRIL 4

Our guest at the PTA Meeting on April 4 8:00 P.M. will be Marian Greenblatt, a member of the Montgomery County Board of Education. Mrs. Greenblatt is a resident of the Cresthaven area and has two children attending our school.

We plan an informal evening with Mrs. Greenblatt answering questions and commenting on some of the decisions made by the Board during the fifteen months she has served in her office.

Please plan to attend and invite your neighbors who have pre-schoolers to attend with you.

WHITE OAK LIBRARY

Thur. March 9 - 10:30 A.M.
Informal story time for 3 - 5 year olds.

Sat. March 11 - 2:00 P.M.
Family film matinee
Tim Driscoll's Donkey

Wed. March 15 - 2:00 P.M.
Story time for 4 - 6 year olds.
Please pre-register.

For more information, call the White Oak Library, 622-2492.

(Summary About the Week Given to Teachers)

WOMEN YESTERDAY, TODAY, & TOMORROW -
Wider Choices for Boys and Girls

What: A week of activities planned for March 13-17

Why: Need perceived by community and educators (e.g., MCPS Dept. of Human Resources, Cresthaven parents, local organizations, national organizations involved with education)

Main features: More than one activity; K-6 involvement; teacher evaluation of activities; a model?

Goals: -Increased awareness of the role of women in history, American and world history to make up for the lack in textbooks

-Awareness of the ways in which women are making history today

-Awareness of choices now open to children in occupations, lifestyles, behavior (reduction of stereotypes, changing expectations, planning for the future)

-Awareness of the inaccurate stereotyped behaviors present on TV, in some books.

Materials: We have been loaned some materials which can be used either in the classroom or as source book materials for teachers, from...

MCPS, Human Relations Department, Montgomery County Libraries, Commission for Women, from individuals

Available here for loans (PLEASE sign them out) or use

Activities: The materials contain many classroom activities. It is expected that individual parents or others will visit during the week to talk about their jobs. Expect visits from C & P and PEPCO people, military women, etc. Librarys will do a display and book talks. Some films are ordered or here.

Other suggested activities: reports on famous American women; panel on women in sports; reviews of tests to see how boys and girls are portrayed, how occupations are portrayed; debate on the Equal Rights Amendment; closed-circuit TV presentation of student-written play with girls and boys in opposite-sex roles; pictures of women and men at work in a wide variety of jobs; pictures of fathers caring for children; compare activities of female and main characters in several stories, same for male characters; examine the wide variety of female and male roles in comic strips; children write down (or do creative writing, act out) what they'll be doing in 20 years-then write what the opposite sex would be doing in 20 years-are the guesses realistic for today's society in view of shrinking family size and growing number of 2-worker families?

Will you need help to make materials for your classes' use?

DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF
ACTIVITIES
MARCH 13-17-CURRICULUM
"WOMEN YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW"

In the past week some new materials and activities have been tried in the classroom. Other schools have expressed interest, and have wondered what was useful and stimulating. When activities are described, the teacher who created the activity deserves credit---something that often doesn't happen when ideas are passed on by word of mouth.

Would you take a moment to answer the questions below so that ideas can be shared and credit given?

Teacher_____ Grade_____

For each special/new activity you tried in the classroom please list:

Activity (describe or attach materials):

Who developed this idea?

Would you permit this idea to be used/copied by others (if you're given credit)?
Yes_____ No_____

What was the most useful aspect of this activity?

What was the least useful aspect of this activity?

Would you use this again?

Attach additional sheets if necessary.
Jan Sinnott 434-1570 Ruth Haynes

(Request for Volunteer Help)

CRESTHAVEN ELEMENTARY

!! COMING ATTRACTIONS - SPECIAL EVENTS !!

During the week of March 13th to 17th Cresthaven students will have the opportunity to enjoy some presentations and activities designed to put them in touch with Women's History and with the wide variety of jobs that will be open to them when they become adults. Besides this, they'll have an opportunity to discuss how the expectations for boys and girls (and women and men) are changing.

Activities planned so far include discussions, book talks, films, a new supply of library books, and other classroom activities. As you saw from the last handout, parents with a wide variety of jobs have been invited to come and talk about or demonstrate what they do every day. So far we expect visits from a policewoman, a tailor, a psychologist, an executive, firefighters, a School Board member, a physician, an artist, a natural scientist, and an attorney, and MORE. How about YOU? Do you have a few minutes to talk about your job? Can you do a bulletin board or contribute an activity or ?????

_____YES, I can help out by doing_____.

_____I'm willing to help -- tell me what to do, and I'll see if I have time.

_____YES, I can talk about my job which is_____.

If you can help, please return this form to Cresthaven SOON!

Jan Sinnott, Coordinator
434-1570 (p.m.)
1109 Devere

NAME:_____